

Hundreds of demonstrators flocked to a busy Irvine intersection Wednesday evening to denounce the disputed Iranian election.

The protesters filled all four corners of Jamboree Road and Barranca Parkway, shouting, chanting, waving flags and signs and cheering at the honks of passing motorists.

The demonstrators spoke out against incumbent Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who they accused of stealing the election. Most of the crowd dressed in green to support reform candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi.

Many waved Iranian flags, as well as handwritten signs reading "Ballots not bullets," "Stop violence against my people," and "Where is my vote?"

"We're trying to make a statement," said Behshad Rahim of South Orange County. "We want our voices heard, our votes counted, and a legitimate, fair election."

"All the people standing here today want change in Iran," said Behrad Tehrani of Lake Forest. "I hope there will be an impact; I hope they are listening."

Protesters were loud but peaceful, with Irvine police officers focusing on keeping traffic lanes clear while largely remaining on the sidelines.

"This is about unity, not religion," said Nunush Karimi of Laguna Niguel. "We want some kind of peace and freedom."

The protest began with an e-mail exchange between Iranian students, Irvine Community Services Commissioner Mariam Khosravani said, gaining support once news of the event hit Facebook, Twitter and Iranian radio stations.

"It's to make sure people pay attention to what is going on in Iran. We don't want to lose

momentum," said Melahat Rafiei, the executive director of the Orange County Democratic party. "They feel lied to, and we are their voice outside of Iran."

The mood Wednesday was a far cry from the optimism expressed by Iranian expatriates who filled the Irvine Hyatt less than a week earlier to cast their votes in what was already a heated election between Ahmadinejad and Mousavi.

Many of the Iranian voters at that time described the election as a referendum on Ahmadinejad and his often-confrontational relationship with the West. Most spoke of casting a vote for change, claiming that Mousavi would help transform the country's foreign policy and turn around an ailing economy.

"We just hope that eventually all the doors to the West will open," said Sheila Parsa of Laguna Niguel

Instead, the disputed election results have sparked civil unrest, with a series of massive marches and gatherings in Iran taking place despite a crackdown that has included the arrest of opposition leaders and a call for the removal of information on Web sites and Iranian blogs that "create tension," according to The Associated Press.

While President Barack Obama and State Department officials have remained cautious in their public comments regarding the Iranian election, Irvine Rep. John Campbell on Wednesday announced that he is co-sponsoring a bill questioning the election results and denouncing Iranian repression.